

## CHAPTER 6. THE EARLY GROUP

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Burials are assigned to the Early Group on the basis of coffin type, relationship to site features, and stratigraphy (see Chapter 4; problematic assignments are noted below). Burials placed in this group appear to pre-date the use of the eastern part of the cemetery by nearby pottery factories, in place circa 1730, for dumping of kiln waste. Absolute dating is not possible, however. For convenience, we give the Early Group a hypothetical end date of 1735.

A sketch of the town and its population precedes the tabulation of the Early Group mortuary sample. The material culture and spatial distribution of the burials are then discussed, followed by a description of unique and unusual interments.

### **6.A. *The town***

New York grew considerably during the first four decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but the burial ground was still outside the developed portion of the town. The southern shore of the Fresh Water (or Collect) Pond was considered the edge of the town proper.<sup>1</sup> The northern extent of development at the end of the period was at present-day Park Row and Franklin Street on the east side of present-day Broadway, and at present-day Liberty Street on the west side of Broadway (see the Lyne-Bradford Plan in Figure 2.6). The “Negros Burying Place,” as it was labeled on Mrs. Buchnerd’s hand-drawn plan of the town in 1735 (Figure 2.8), was in the northern part of the Common. The Common traditionally was open space that townspeople could use for pasture and for digging sod and burning lime, though the latter activities were barred in the area south of the Collect in the first quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The town used the Common as a parade ground for troops, for celebrations and bonfires, and for executions. The municipal powder house was built in 1728 on a small island between the Collect and Little Collect, just east of the African Burial Ground.<sup>2</sup>

A number of churches had been established in New York by the end of our early period, some of which had African members, but it appears they were not burying blacks in their cemeteries. In addition to the Dutch Reformed, Anglican, French Huguenot, Lutheran,

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<sup>1</sup> This is reflected in laws of the time, which typically state that provisions apply to the area south of the Collect or Fresh Water. As noted in Chapter 3, the pond was fed by deep springs and was used by the general public for fishing and for drinking water, and later would be used by private industries such as tanning.

<sup>2</sup> See historical summaries of the vicinity of the African Burial Ground in each chronological period in Harris et al. 1993; for detail on specific structures in the area throughout its history see Hunter Research 1994.

and Quaker churches and the Jewish synagogue established in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, by 1728 there were two additional Anglican and Dutch Reformed congregations, as well as Baptist and Presbyterian churches, all located within the town proper (Rothschild 1990:47). French Huguenot Elias Neau had begun a school for Africans in 1704.

Regulation of the activities of enslaved people grew extremely restrictive in this period. English roll-back of the margin of freedom allowed under Dutch rule culminated in 1702 with *An Act for Regulating Slaves* (New York Colony, Laws 1691-1775(1):519-21), and from then on both the colonial government and New York's Common Council continued

from year to year to legislate social control over blacks, enslaved and free. The 1702 law was renewed in 1705 and again in 1719.

<b>Table 6.1. Sources of imports of enslaved Africans into New York Colony, 1701 to 1726<sup>3</sup></b>		
<b>Year</b>	<b>From the West Indies</b>	<b>From the Coast of Africa</b>
1701	36	
1702	165	
1703	16	
1704	8	
1705	-	24
1710	-	53
1711	-	55
1712	-	77
1714	53	
1715	17	38
1716	19	43
1717	68	266
1718	447	70
1719	104	
1720	81	
1721	76	117*
1722	106	
1723	82	
1724	61	
1725	54	59
1726	180	
	1348	822
Total number: 2395		
* "Entered from the Coast of Africa but found afterwards to have been from Madagascar"		

Enslaved people were brought to New York City directly from Africa and via the Caribbean. For New York Colony as a whole, the importations in the period of the Early Group are listed in Table 6.1. There is no way of knowing how many of these captives and which ones remained in the city of New York, but the preponderance of those who had spent time in the Caribbean was probably reflected in the town's enslaved population. It is also likely that the importations directly from Africa resulted in intermittent infusions of African-born individuals into the local community, since town residents would have had a ready opportunity to acquire captives at the docks.

Tensions between Africans and Europeans flared with the 1712 Rising (Governor Hunter to the Lords of Trade, June 23, 1712, in O'Callaghan and Fernow 1853-87(5):341-42; Scott 1961). African-born captives (along with diverse others) appear to have played a role in the insurrection, and participants are thought to have used African practices to bind each other's loyalty. It is possible those executed were interred in the African Burial Ground, though authorities may have kept some of the bodies from burial as a further retribution for the uprising (as would be the case in the executions of 1741). No burials that appear to have been mangled or otherwise buried inauspiciously were

assigned to the Early Group.

<sup>3</sup> Source: "Account obtained from the collector of the customs," December 16, 1726, in O'Callaghan and Fernow 1853-87(5):814.

The revolt led to the colony's most restrictive and punitive legislation to date, *An Act for Preventing Suppressing and Punishing the Conspiracy and Insurrection of Negroes and other Slaves* (New York Colony, Laws 1691-1775(1):761-67). It reiterated the 1702 law and added clauses meant to reduce interaction between free and enslaved Africans, and to prevent ownership of property by free "Negro, Indian, or Mullato" persons. It curtailed manumission by setting high bond prices (though the latter were removed in 1717).

<b>Table 6.2. Deaths of Blacks, August to December, 1731</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>Black deaths</b>	<b>Blacks deaths from smallpox</b>
Aug. 23		
Sept. 6	6	3
Sept. 13	8	7
Sept. 20	6	4
Sept. 27	7	6
Oct. 4	14	10
Oct. 11	9	8
Oct. 18*	12	
Oct. 25		
Nov. 1	7**	
Nov. 8***	0	
Nov. 15	2	
Total when smallpox reporting ceased	71	
Nov. 22	4	
Nov. 29	1	
Dec. 5	1	
Dec. 13	0	
Dec. 21	2	
Total reported	79	
*Cause not specified from this date on, though the report indicates "most of smallpox." **Includes last 2 weeks. ***The Gazette reported that no new cases of smallpox had appeared in the last week. Source: New-York Gazette, Aug. 23-30 through Dec. 13-21 1731.		

Restrictions were placed on African funerals as well (see Chapter 2). Some of the archaeologically recovered burials in the Early Group might have been interred during the years after night funerals (1722) and large corteges and pall-draped coffins (1731) had been banned.

Some might also have been interred in 1731, when a devastating smallpox epidemic struck New York. This is the only time for which bills of mortality listing blacks were published. Of 79 deaths reported, at least 50 were probably from the disease. As shown in Table 6.2, in any given week the maximum number of deaths never rose above 14. Implications for burials at the African Burial Ground are discussed in section 6.C.

## 6.B. The population

### Census

Census figures for Africans in this period are contained in Table 6.3. The sex ratio fluctuated, from a preponderance of men and male children in 1703, equalizing in 1712, more women than men in 1723, and back to near parity in 1731. We have interpreted the increasing numbers of girls and women as indicative of the growing demand for domestics as the European residential population grew.<sup>4</sup> The number of children per woman was approximately one throughout the period. The proportion of the population that was labeled as "Negro," "Black," or "Slave" (note that this category

included Native Americans) stayed fairly stable at around 18% throughout the period.

<sup>4</sup> For discussions of overall demographic patterns, see Rankin-Hill et al. 2004 (Chapter 7 of the Skeletal Biology Report).

**Table 6.3.**  
**Black population by age and sex, 1700-1731**

Year	Adults		Children		Age for children	Label in census
	(male)	(female)	(male)	(female)		
1703	298	276	124	101	<16	"Negroes"
1712	321	320	155	179	<16	"slaves"
1723	408	476	220	258	not given	"Negroes and other slaves"
1731	599	607	186	185	<11	"blacks"

Source: Green and Harrington (1932); U.S. Bureau of the Census (1909).

### Mortuary sample

Early Group burials, numbering 51, are listed in Table 6.4. In the table, head angle is the orientation in degrees west of north (discussed in Chapter 5). Preservation codes are explained in Chapter 3. An asterisk indicates a problematic assignment, such as where the coffin shape was not determined but stratigraphic considerations point to early burial. The distribution of Early Group graves at the excavated site is shown on Figures 6.1a-e following the table. Age and sex profiles are graphed in Figures 6.2 and 6.3.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 6.4.**  
**Early Group burials**

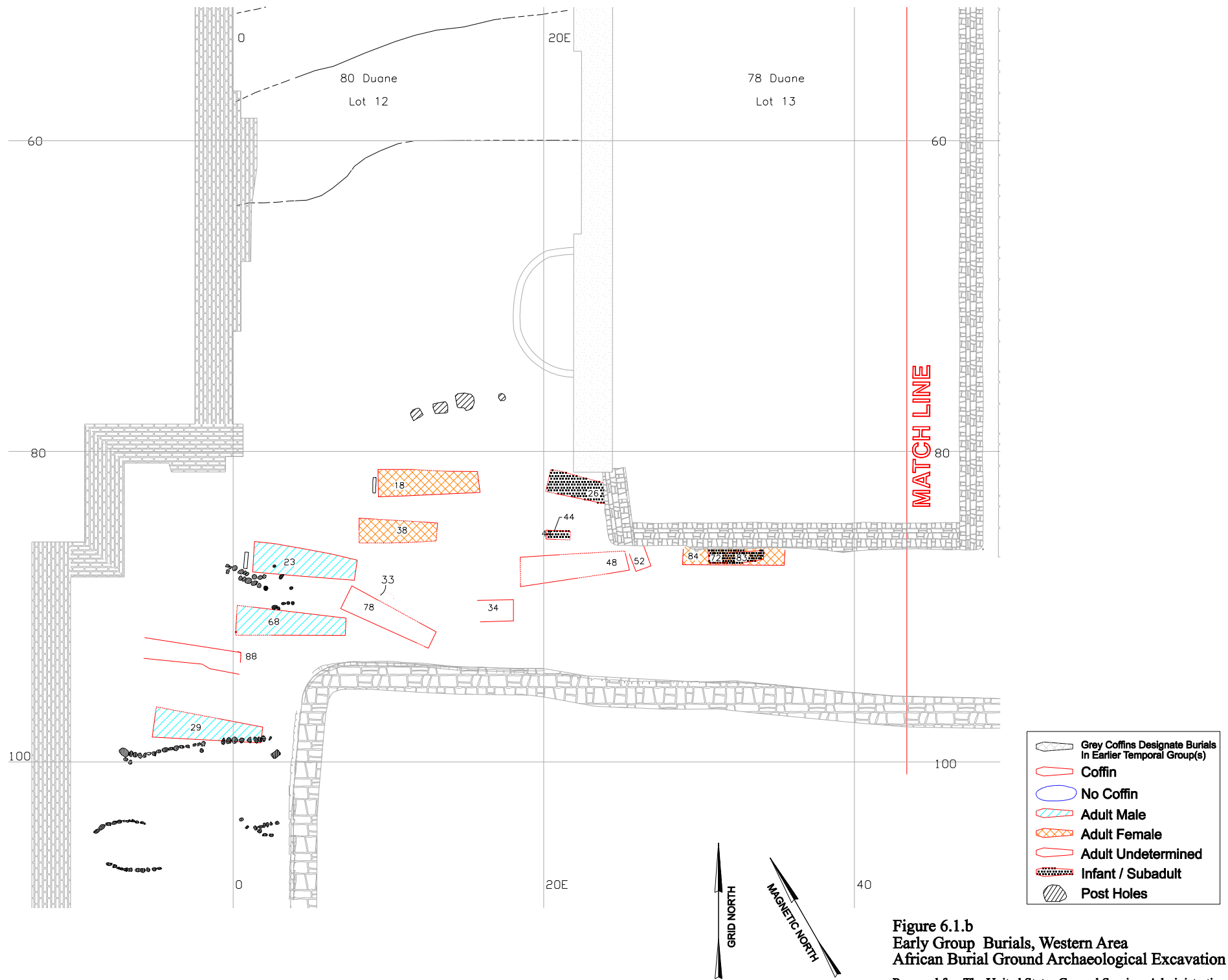
Burial	Low age	High age	Sex	Head angle	Grid East	Grid South	Preservation	Coffin
B018	35	45	female?	93	12	81.5	y	tapered
B023	25	35	male	85	8	87.5	y	tapered
B026*	8	12	undete	78	20	83	y	four-sided
B029	35	45	male?	82	0	97.5	y	tapered
B033			undete	93	10	87.5	n	Re-deposited bones
B034			undete		15	87.5	n	rectangle?
B038	12	18	female	90	10	86	y	tapered
B044*	3	9	undete		21.5	85.5	y	four-sided
B048			undete	97	20	87.5	y	tapered
B052			undete	18	25	87.5	n	rectangle
B068	21	25	male	87	3.5	91	y	tapered
B072*	1	2	undete	90	34	87.5	y	rectangle
B078	16	19	undete	64	10	91	y	tapered

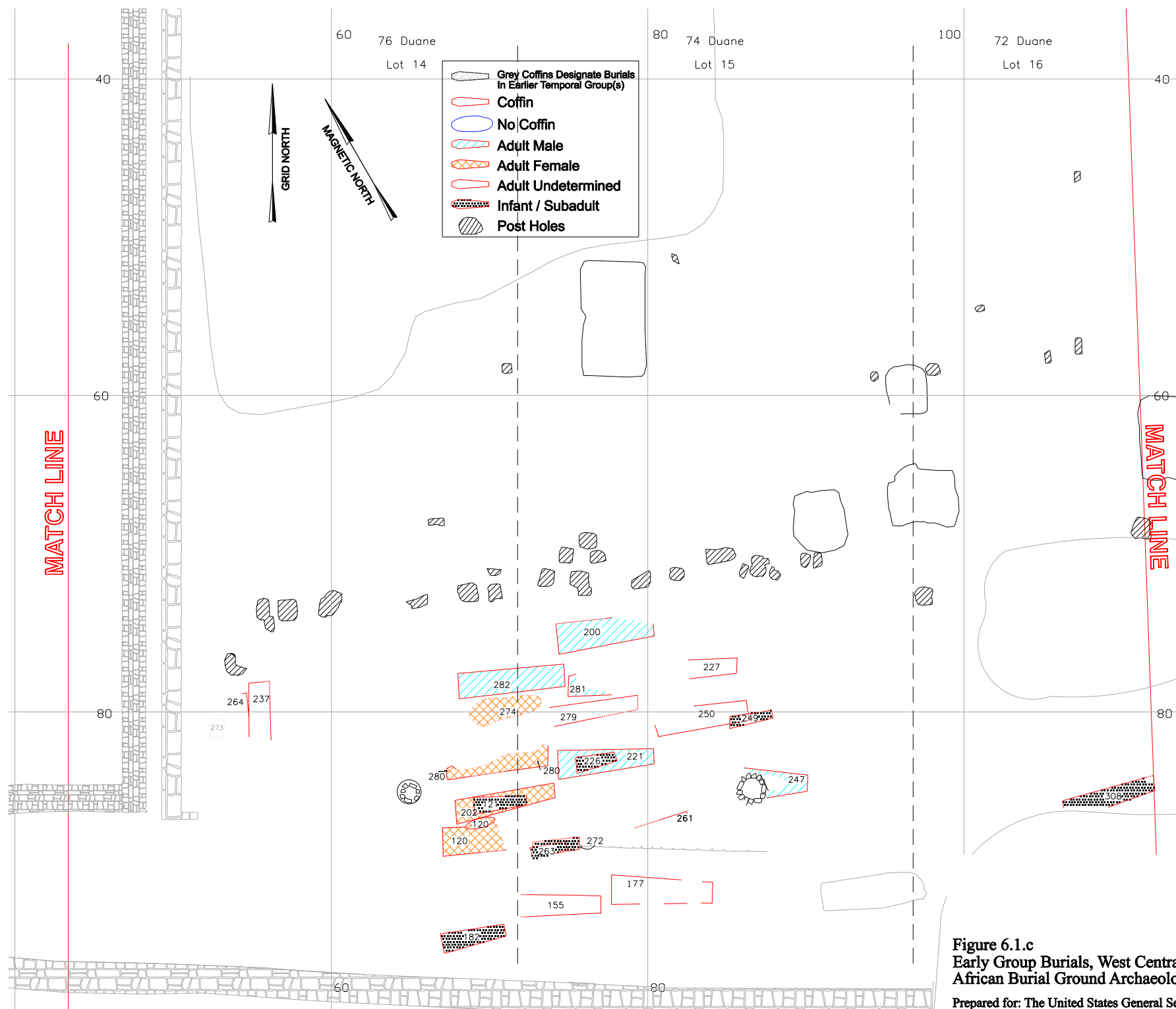
<sup>5</sup> Aging and sexing methods are described in Blakey et al. 2004a (Chapter 4 of the Skeletal Biology Report).

**Table 6.4.**  
**Early Group burials**

Burial	Low age	High age	Sex	Head angle	Grid East	Grid South	Preservation	Coffin
B083*			undete	95	31	87.5	y	rectangle
B084	17	21	female	89	35	87.5	y	four-sided
B088			undete	81	-4	93.5	n	unident.
B120	25	34	female	93	70	88.5	y	tapered
B121	2.5	4.5	undete	98	70	86	y	tapered
B155			undete	92	75	92	n	four-sided
B177	30	60	undete	88	80	91.5	y	tapered
B182	7.5	12.5	undete	102	69	94	y	tapered
B200			male	98	77	75.5	y	four-sided
B202	12	18	female?	108	70	85.5	y	tapered
B221	30	60	male	96	77	83.5	y	tapered
B226	0	0.17	undete	105	77	83	y	tapered
B227			undete	96	84	77	n	four-sided
B237			undete	183	55.5	80	n	four-sided?
B247*	35	49.9	male?	90	90	84.5	n	unident.
B249*	0.67	1.33	undete	101	87	81	y	tapered
B250			undete	98	84	80.5	y	four-sided
B261	no skeletal remains				80	87.5	n	unident.
B263			undete	105	74	88.5	y	tapered
B264			undete		55	80	n	unident.
B272	0.25	0.75	undete	100	74.5	88.5	y	four-sided
B279			undete	99	75.5	76.5	n	four-sided
B280			female?	96	70	83	n	four-sided
B281			male?	90	75	79.5	y	four-sided
B282	32.5	42.5	male	96	71.5	77.5	y	four-sided
B307*	45	55	male?	88	115.5	82.5	y	no coffin
B308			undete	109	109	84.5	y	four-sided
B340	39.3	64.4	female	94	236.5	88.5	y	tapered
B361	33	57	male	85	249	88.5	y	tapered
B382*	4	5	undete	110	215	71.5	y	four-sided
B387	34	44	male	109	227	78	y	tapered
B388	29	57	female	112	222	75.5	y	tapered
B389			female	100	220	82	y	tapered
B402			undete	100	235	84.5	n	tapered
B404*			female	96	165	79.5	n	tapered
B416			undete	101	142	71.5	y (no cranium)	tapered
B426			undete		141	69.5	n (not excavated)	tapered?
B432			undete	90	220	78	y	rectangle?

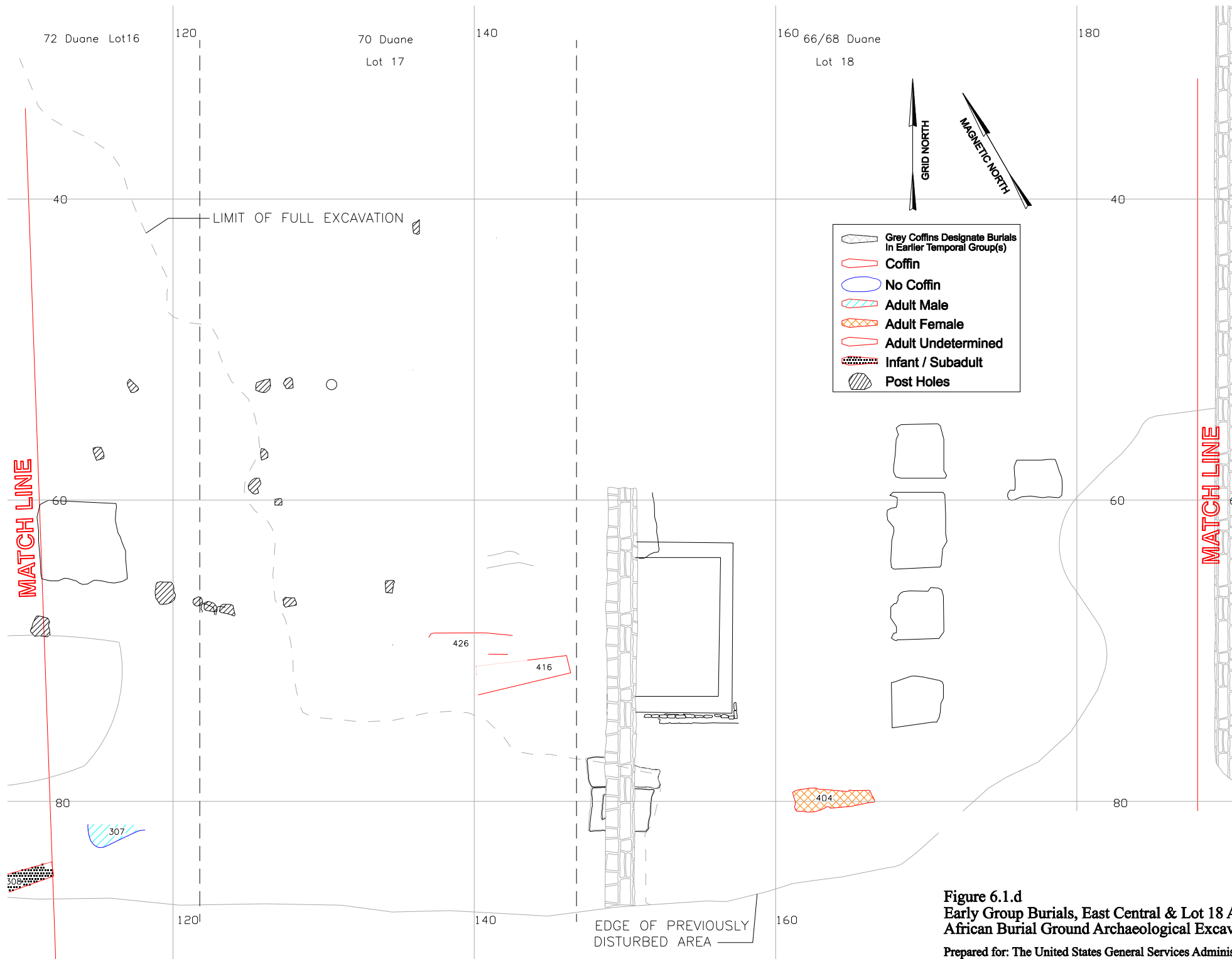




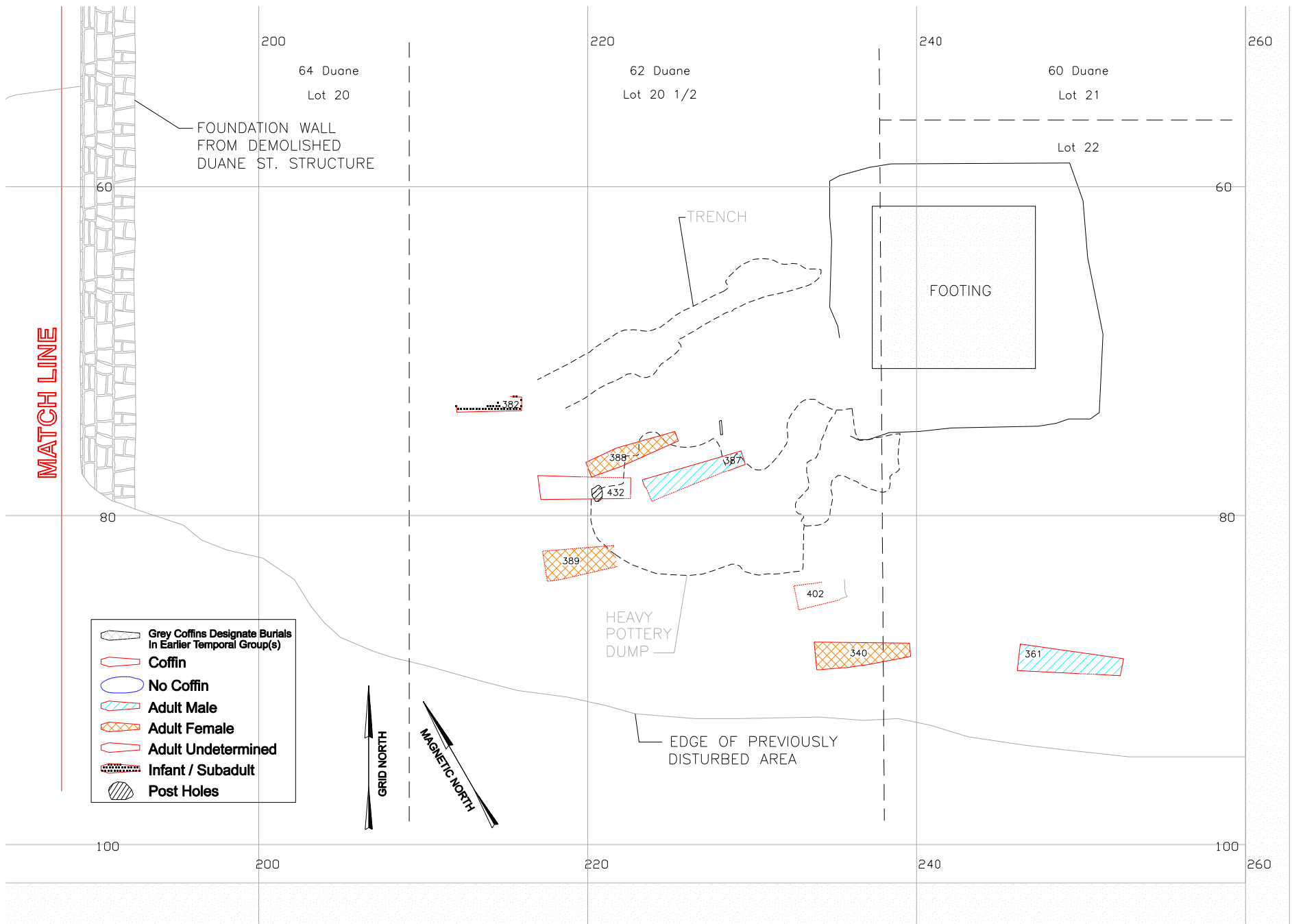


**Figure 6.1.c**  
**Early Group Burials, West Central Area**  
**African Burial Ground Archaeological Excavation**  
 Prepared for: The United States General Services Administration





**Figure 6.1.d**  
**Early Group Burials, East Central & Lot 18 Areas**  
**African Burial Ground Archaeological Excavation**  
 Prepared for: The United States General Services Administration



**Figure 6.1.e**  
**Early Group Burials, Eastern Area**  
**African Burial Ground Archaeological Excavation**  
 Prepared for: The United States General Services Administration

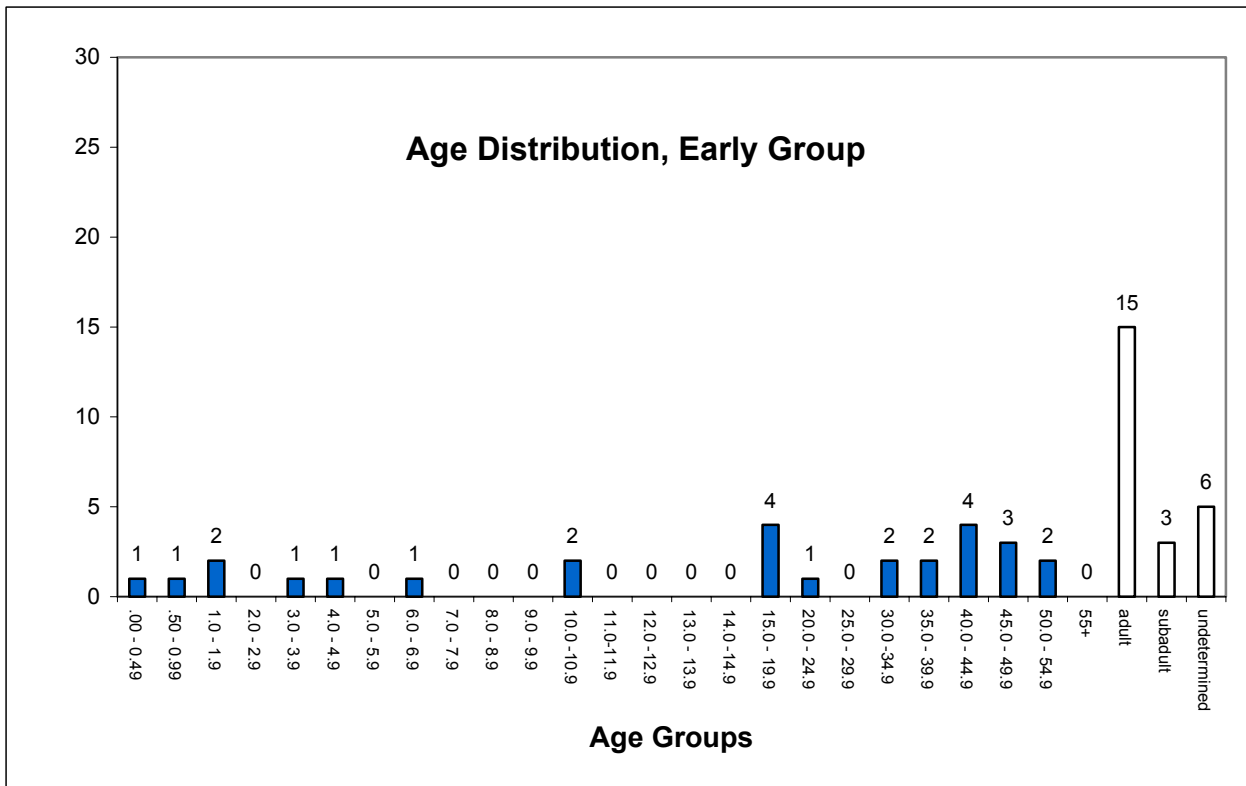


Figure 6.2.  
Age distribution, Early Group. White bars are individuals whose age could not be determined (includes only burials from which remains were recovered).

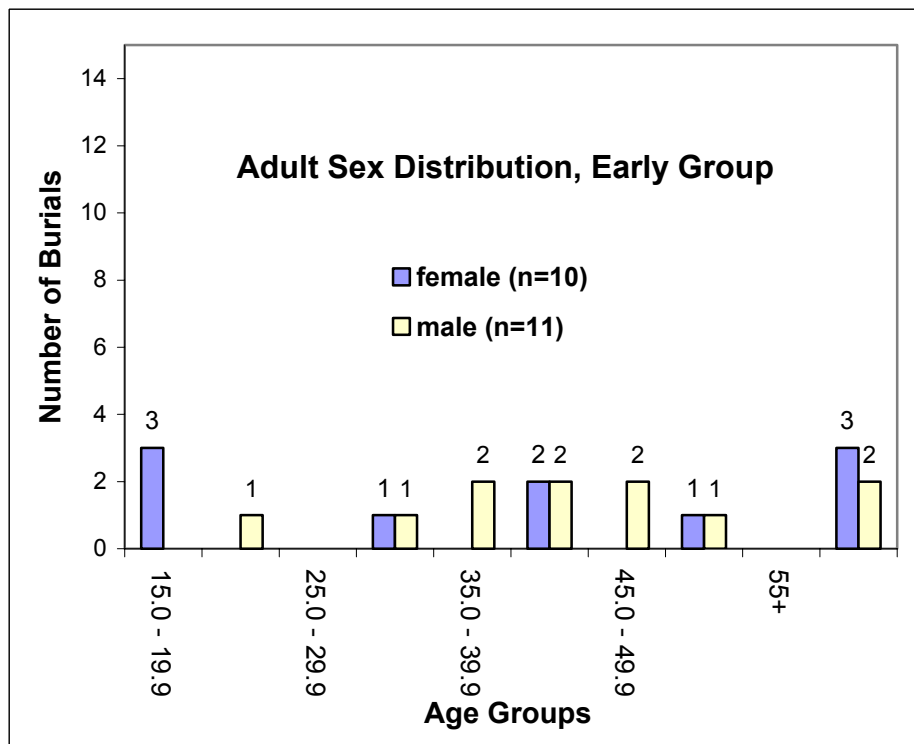


Figure 6.3.  
Adult sex distribution, Early Group.

The small number of subadults ( $n = 6$ , or 13% of the group) can probably be attributed to poor preservation, but other possibilities should be considered. Infant and child mortality may have been lower for some reason in these years, but this is highly unlikely. It is possible that a separate area of the African Burial Ground was being used for children in the Early Group, though there is no clear evidence of this. Moreover, in two cases a toddler and an infant were deliberately buried with adults. While we cannot extrapolate a general rule from these examples, they at least suggest that children were not segregated in death. Still, inauspicious deaths of infants or stillbirths may have required different types of burial or burial elsewhere, so this possibility cannot be ruled out. In section 6.D a hypothetical alternative assignment of a concentration of child burials to the Early Group is discussed.

### **6.C. *Mortuary material culture***

Early Group burials were all in coffins except for Burial 307. It is possible that other burials without coffins have not survived from this period, since the length of time in the ground and the possibility of disturbance from later interments would have affected preservation. As noted, early coffins by definition were four-sided and tapered toward the foot. Very few of the early burials had items in the coffin with the deceased, but again poor preservation due to the extended length of time in the ground may be a factor in the low frequency of burial artifacts. It is possible that decomposition claimed all trace of some pins, buttons, or cloth in some of these burials.

Thirteen individuals had copper-alloy straight pins. The pins were mainly on the crania, with some in the neck area. Only one person, the infant in Burial 226, had a pin in another area of the body (the innominate or hip). The exception is in keeping with the overall findings on pin placement: young children were most likely to have been wrapped and pinned all along the body (see Chapter 11). Burial 361 had a pewter button that might have fastened a shirt collar. Burial 250 also had a button, of copper alloy, that was found in the pelvic area along with an iron mass and a bead, suggesting a talisman or memento rather than clothing. A textile pseudomorph (a corrosion product that permeated the fibers and replaced them, creating an exact replica) was recovered from Burial 121, the only evidence of cloth from the Early Group. It is likely most individuals were shrouded.

Most of the beads recovered at the African Burial Ground belong to this period: two of the individuals at the cemetery who were buried wearing strung beads, Burial 340 (112 beads at the waist and wrist) and Burial 226 (8 beads at the neck), are in the Early Group, and a single bead was found with an adult of undetermined sex in Burial 250. Since beads are unusual in graves at this cemetery, their presence in three Early Group interments is significant. The beads recovered with the infant in Burial 226 are unusual for yet another reason: they were characteristic of West African manufacture (see Chapter 13.C). The bead from Burial 250 was recovered from the central part of the coffin, possibly near the pelvis, in association with an iron mass, a pewter tack, and a copper-alloy button. The beads are discussed in Chapter 13.

#### **6.D. *Spatial distribution***

In this section and the corresponding sections of Chapters 7 through 9, we discuss burial distribution and spatial groupings that we have discerned. No attempt is made to discuss the location of each individual burial. Early Group burials were distributed over the entire site from east to west (Figure 6.1a-e). They were missing from the area north of the fence line, which we believe was not in use until the final quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (see Chapter 9). All but two Early Group burials were interred with their heads to the west, and all were laid supine.

A concentration of burials that are assigned to the Early Group occurred in the western part of the excavated site, extending from the north-south leg of former Republican Alley eastward to the alley behind Lot 13. The distribution of the concentration was relatively loose, and the concentration itself may well be “false” because building construction obliterated so much of this part of the cemetery. The most clearly defined concentration within the Early Group is located approximately between grid coordinates E65 and E90. We refer to this as the middle concentration. The third area considered is the far eastern part of the excavated site. It is likely that early burials originally extended to the west and north of this area but were either destroyed or not excavated archaeologically. The eastern group is treated separately here because these burials are in a defined area that subsequently became a dump for pottery waste material.

Between the middle and eastern concentrations, from grid coordinates 110E to 160E, there were only five Early Group burials. However, excavations were not complete in the area north of grid line 75S and east of grid line 130E, and it is possible additional early interments are still in place. Also, based on the stratigraphic relationships reconstructed in the vicinity, the area south of grid line 75S and between grid 130E and 150E may have been eroded or leveled at some time in the past, resulting in a loss of early burials that may have been situated on the hillside. Graves that were placed here subsequently, however, survived.

Burial orientation in the Early Group was uniformly west-headed with one exception, Burial 237/264 (probably a single individual—see section 6.E). The distribution of precise orientation angles within the west-headed early burials differs from that of later groups (Figure 5.4). There is no peak frequency at grid west (90° west of grid north) as there is for later groups. The most frequent orientation ( $n = 5$  burials) is at 96° west of north, but the rest of the graves were fairly evenly distributed at more northerly and more southerly orientations.

##### The western concentration

The western early concentration (shown on Figure 6.1b) includes thirteen to fifteen burials: Burials 18, 23, 29, 33, 34, 38, 48, 68, 72, 78, 83, 84, 88, and possibly 26 and 44.

Burials 18 and 23 are notable because grave markers associated with them were recovered archaeologically. As we saw in Chapter 3, this is the part of the site where the

early ground surfaces were preserved beneath the fill. The grave markers consisted of flat, squared stones that appeared to have been placed upright at the heads of the graves.

The flat, rectangular stone associated with Burial 18 was still in place, vertical and perfectly aligned with the grave and coffin (Figure 5.8). The deceased was between thirty-five and forty-five years old, probably a woman (the sex could not be determined with full certainty due to the deterioration of the bones). Other than the coffin nails and a remnant of coffin lid identified as red cedar, no other artifacts were recovered from the burial. No engraving was observed on the stone. Had the stone ever been engraved, some trace might have survived since the stone was covered with soil rather than exposed to the air. The stone was not salvaged after the collapse of the World Trade Center, and it was never measured or identified as to type of stone or geologic provenience.

The stone that is thought to be associated with Burial 23 (Figures 5.10 and 5.11) was askew, but otherwise appeared to have been in place at what turned out to be the head of the grave. A line of cobbles, also possibly marking the grave at the surface, was recorded just to the south (see Figure 6.1b). Burial 23 held a man between twenty-five and thirty-five years old. This burial and the adjacent Burial 68 (of a man between twenty-one and twenty-five) had virtually identical coffins, probably from the same coffin-maker (see Chapter 10).

Burial 38, which held a young woman between twelve and eighteen years of age, may have belonged to a grave grouping that included Burials 18, 23, and 68. The cluster also may have included Burial 78, which held the remains of an individual of undetermined sex, between sixteen and nineteen years of age. Burial 78, however, was distinct in that it had a much more northerly orientation than the others. Indeed, it was the most northerly-skewed of the head-to-west burials from the site. Burials 33 and 34, very partial and disturbed burials (possibly representing a single individual), may have been originally part of the group, but their condition makes assignment to the Early Group tentative.

The presence of grave markers raises the possibility that later interments were deliberately placed with reference to these early graves. Therefore, *burial groupings that span time periods* must be considered, not only here but also in other locations at the site where surface markers might once have been present but did not survive archaeologically. Figure 6.4 shows burials from all temporal groups, and should be compared to Figure 6.1b.

Burials 24 and 27 (young children) are assigned to the Middle Group, but might have been positioned deliberately between Burials 23 and 78 (center left in Figure 6.4). Burial 27 had a very northerly orientation, as though it were aligned with Burial 78. Burials 53 and 55 may have been placed deliberately among existing, Early Group burials as well.

Later burials overlying Burials 18 and 38 included Burial 7 on the north side of Burial 18 and Burials 11, 5, 6 and 30, which clustered above Burial 38 (upper center in Figure 6.4). All of these later burials

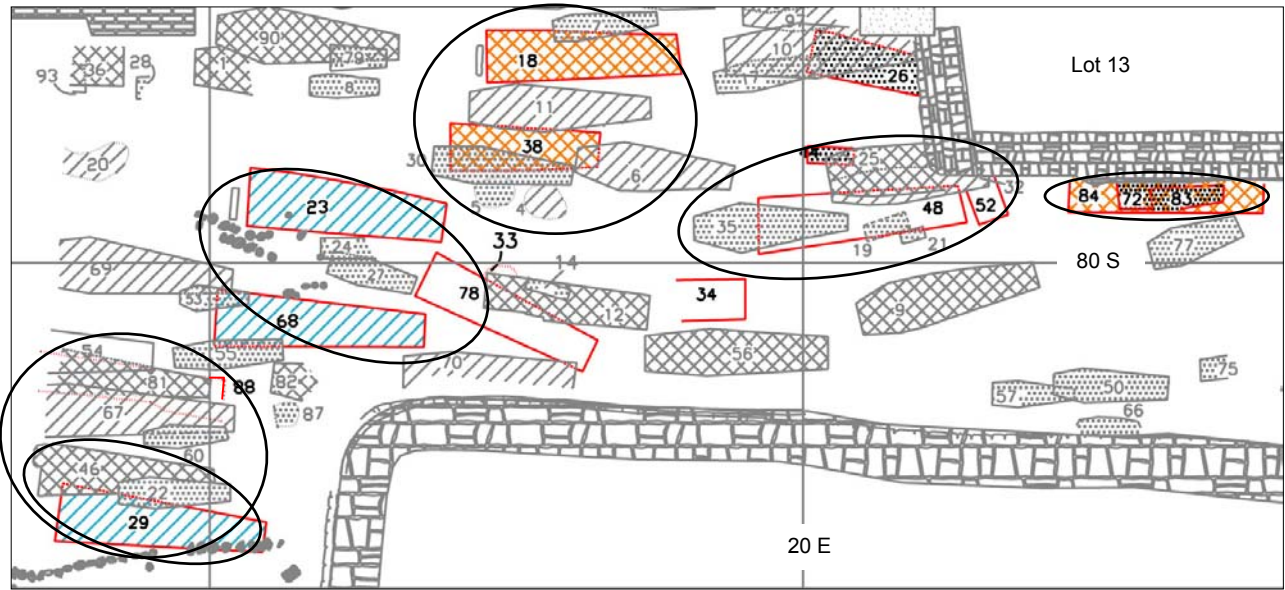


Figure 6.4.  
Detail (5W to 35E) of the southwestern portion of the site plan (Figure 1.7), showing all temporal groups. Early Group burials are shown in color. Possible clusters mentioned in the text are circled.

may have been added to a group anchored by the early burials 18 and 38. Burial 6, however, which is off-set to the east of the others, is assigned to the Late Group and may have been aligned with other late interments rather than with underlying early graves.

Burials 54, 81, 67, 60, 46 and 22 may have been deliberately placed above Early burials 29 and 88 (at left in Figure 6.4). Burial 29 held a man between thirty-five and forty-five years of age; Burial 88 held an individual of undetermined sex and age. Prior to uncovering Burials 22, 46, and 29, excavators had recorded a line of small cobbles, which ran east-west just south of the burials. The line was three to four feet above the Burial 29 coffin. The grave marker may be associated with Burial 29 (or alternatively with Burial 47 to the south; the latter association was assumed in the field), or may have formed a boundary marker between two grave groups. It is possible Burial 46 was deliberately placed next to the man in the marked Burial 29, and that Burial 22, a child between 2.5 and 4.5 years in age, who was interred later, was deliberately placed immediately above the two without disturbing them at all.<sup>6</sup>

An apparent cluster of burials at the southwest corner of Lot 13 (in the upper right corner of Figure 6.4) includes burials from our Early and Middle temporal groups. Burials 25 and 32 (described in Chapter 7) were placed above Burials 44, 48 and 52, and Burial 35 overlay the west half of Burial 48. Highly disturbed graves of young children or infants, Burials 19 and 21, were also found with the cluster, though perhaps these were interred later.

<sup>6</sup> See the burial descriptions in Volumes 2 and 3 for additional detail and alternative sequences for all burials.

Of course, the intensive re-use of the cemetery in this area may account for the overlapping graves, and the interpretation that perceived groupings were deliberate, spanning long time periods, is tenuous. Still, the stone and cobble grave markers provide added support for such an interpretation.

### The middle concentration

Approximately between the east-west grid coordinates 65E and 90E a concentration of early burials has been identified (shown on Figure 6.1c), comprising Burials 120, 121, 155, 177, 182, 200, 202, 221, 226, 227, 250, 261, 263, 272, 279, 280, 281, and 282. “Gaps” in the overall distribution of burials that *may* have been caused by construction disturbance lie to the east and to the west of this concentration, but nevertheless it appears to be real. In general, the middle cluster has a coherence to it, attributable to a fairly regular arrangement of graves with little variation in orientation.

The significance of the concentration is a matter of conjecture. One possibility is that the distribution simply reflects the topography of the cemetery. This area was apparently relatively flat, forming a small “terrace” on the hillside that sloped down toward the east. Burials continued to be concentrated in this general area in later periods. Figure 3.17 shows the distribution of burial elevations across the site, and the “flat” area between approximately 50E and 100E is apparent.

We do not discount, however, the possibility that this group represents ties of kinship, religion, or ethnicity. No common attributes other than burial orientation, time period, and burial location left behind any trace, a function, perhaps, of the general lack of preserved material culture.

The burials include 12 adults and just 5 children,<sup>7</sup> but early child and infant graves may not have survived. In several cases, co-interment of children with adults was suggested by the arrangement of burials. The most likely pairs are Burials 121 and 202, Burials 226 and 221, and Burials 250 and 249.

Burial 121, which held a child between two-and-a-half and four-and-a-half years old, was buried above the twelve-to-eighteen year old in Burial 202, identified as a probable female (Figure 6.5). The two burials either were interred at the same time or Burial 121 was deliberately placed within the Burial 202 grave at a later date. The coffins were essentially aligned, the child’s centered atop the adult’s. The grave shaft of another early burial, Burial 202, was directly adjacent to the north of the grave shaft of Burial 120, and though the two did not share a grave and were aligned slightly differently, it is possible this placement was deliberate, also. Burial 120, which held a woman between twenty-

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<sup>7</sup> One burial in the cluster, Burial 261, consisted only of coffin remains and no skeletal remains were recovered. Burial 126/143, representing a later interment of two children in the same coffin, truncated the majority of Burial 261. The excavators of Burial 261 believed that all three individuals were interred in the same grave shaft, and in fact the coffins seem to have been oriented exactly parallel to each other. It seems clear, however, that Burial 261 pre-dated Burial 126/143, and there was apparently no effort to preserve the former when the second burial took place.



five and thirty-four years old, was disturbed when a later grave was dug (Burial 119), at which time long bones from Burial 120 were placed in a small pile against the south side of the Burial 202 coffin (Figure 6.6).



Figure 6.5.  
*In situ* photograph of Burial 121, which held a child, within the grave shaft of Burial 202. The Burial 202 coffin outline is barely discernable to the left of the child's coffin. Photograph by Dennis Seckler.



Figure 6.6.  
*In situ* photograph of displaced bones from the woman in Burial 120. They had been disturbed when a later grave was being dug, and the gravedigger had placed them in a small, neat pile alongside the coffin of neighboring Burial 202. North is to right. Photograph by Dennis Seckler.

The infant in Burial 226 was interred atop Burial 221, which held a man between the ages of thirty and sixty. It is possible that Burial 226 had a grave shaft of its own within that of Burial 221, in which case it was interred at least slightly later in time. Alternatively, Burial 226 was interred at the same time as Burial 221, and the soil distinction was the result of the decay of Burial 226. The infant, as noted in section 6.C, was buried wearing a strand of fired-glass beads that were probably made in West Africa.

Burials 250 and 249 may also form a deliberate pair; in this case, however, the infant (Burial 249) was placed above the foot of the adult's coffin, slightly to one side. Burial 250 held an adult of undetermined age and sex; the infant in Burial 249 was between six and sixteen months old.

It is also possible that the infants in Burials 263 and 272 were placed deliberately near the woman in Burial 120. The only other child, between seven-and-a-half and twelve-and-a-half, was in Burial 182; the grave was separate from any adult's.

The above cases indicate that burial of young children within or adjacent to the graves of adults was preferred by the period when the Early Group was interred. As discussed in Chapter 5, we have identified this as a mortuary practice that was common, though not universal, at the African Burial Ground. The relationships between the young woman and child in Burials 121 and 202 or between the man and the infant in Burials 226 and 221 can only be guessed at. However, we interpret these co-interments as evidence that burial with some kind of kin was preferred, however "kin" might have been defined.

As in the western concentration, the possibility that grave clusters spanned time periods was explored. Where early graves were truncated and partially destroyed by later interments, we are less inclined to posit a deliberate grouping. Burials 120, 155, 261, 279, and 280 were all partially destroyed by later burials. Burial 227 was truncated on the west, probably during the interment of Burial 256, from the femur heads up, but the skull had apparently been replaced within the coffin, suggesting a measure of regard for the earlier burial.

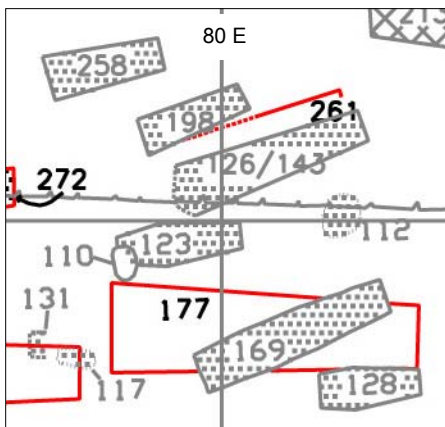


Figure 6.7.  
Detail (90S/80E) of site plan (Figure 1.7) showing later child burials near Early Group Burial 177.

Only Burials 250 and 177 were left undisturbed by later interments. Burial 249 lay immediately above the southeast corner of Burial 250, and the two have been discussed above as a possible paired interment. Burial 177 was overlain by two later children's graves with hexagonal coffins (Burials 128 and 169), and a string of other children's graves (including Burials 123, 126/143, 198, and 258) lay to its north (Figure 6.7). Highly disturbed children's remains also lay nearby (Burials 110, 112, 117, and 131), probably from the latest period of the cemetery. It is impossible to know whether this concentration of children's graves had any reference to the early Burial 177 or other early graves nearby.



to four years), and their spatial concentration might point to a special, separate placement of at least some children within the cemetery (in an area that may have extended eastward where graves have been obliterated). Only one of these children had an associated artifact: Burial 254, a young child had a silver pendant at his or her neck (see Chapter 13).

There is one other piece of evidence that *may* point to an early date for Burial 207. Oak pollen made up seven percent of pollen types on the coffin lid, just nine tenths of a percent in the grave fill, and one and four tenths of a percent in the stomach of Burial 207. It is possible that the “grave fill” sample is from the later midden that overlay this area, but the “coffin lid” sample is derived from the original soil into which the grave was dug, with an early pollen spectrum in which oak was prominent (i.e., prior to the clearance of lower Manhattan; see Appendix G for the pollen analysis).

This alternative chronological interpretation of Burial 207 and surrounding graves should be considered when analyzing change over time at the cemetery. However, in this report we have assigned Burial 207 to the Late Group and place the children’s graves in the middle groups.

#### The eastern concentration

Seven early burials were identified in the southeastern corner of the excavation site (shown on Figure 6.1e), Burials 340, 361, 382, 387, 388, 389, 402 and 432. As noted, these do not necessarily represent an original concentration of graves, because the limited preservation and excavation in the eastern part of the site make it impossible to gauge the actual distribution. In this area, stoneware pottery waste was dumped on the surface of the cemetery beginning sometime after about 1730 (see Chapter 4). Some of the burials assigned to the Early Group here contain these sherds and pieces of kiln furniture, though not in the same high concentrations as later burials that were clearly dug into the midden. It is possible the waste material is intrusive into these graves from later dumping; alternatively, they represent interments that overlap in time with the dumping. Burials 387, 388, and 389 may post-date the beginning of the stoneware accumulation, and thus fall late in the early group. Each had stoneware within the grave shaft, though not the high volume of others to their south and east – they appear to have been at the edge of the dumping area (or else they were pre-dump but had debris mixed into upper layers through later disturbances).

The discernment of burial clusters in the eastern area is impossible due to the partial excavation. There is one *possible* north-south alignment of graves running from Burial 382 on the north southward through Burials 388, 387, 402, and 340, which might reflect a contour in the slope. Otherwise, the proximity of Burials 389, 432, 388, and 387 is noted as a possible cluster, with the latter two considered a pair. Burials 388 and 387 were nearly identical in terms of grave shaft shape and coffin style (see Chapter 10). Burial 388 was of an adult woman whose age could not be determined, Burial 387 of a man 34 to 44 years old.

### **6.E. *Unique and unusual burials***

There are many distinctive interments at the African Burial Ground, and most are described in this report in one place or another. Early Group Burial 340, for example, was described in Chapter 5. Here and in Chapters 7 through 9, burials that warrant special mention and/or are not dealt with elsewhere are described under this heading.

#### South-headed and coffin-less burials

To the west of the middle concentration (Figure 6.1c), there were two very poorly preserved interments identified as Burials 237 and 264, which are probably the remains of a single burial. This grave appears to have been oriented with the head to the south. Burial 237 consisted of partial remains, completely truncated above the pelvis. Burial 264 was immediately adjacent to the west and parallel, and consisted only of partial right leg bones oriented exactly the same way, and coffin wood remains.

As we discussed in Chapter 5, head-to-west burial was clearly the norm at this cemetery. The deceased was probably an adult, but sex and age could not be determined from the surviving bones. No artifacts other than coffin remains were found with the burial. The other south-headed burials at the cemetery are in the far eastern area and have been placed with the middle rather than the earlier temporal group. No explanation for the unusual orientation can be offered at this time. Although it is possible this was a Muslim burial, with the deceased originally placed on the side and meant to face east, the presence of a coffin makes such an interpretation less tenable.

Burials 307 and 308 were located to the east of the middle concentration, in a very disturbed part of the cemetery (Figures 6.1c-d). It is not possible to say with certainty that they are isolated from other early burials; this apparent spatial separation may be a function of the area's disturbance. They may have been aligned with each other, though the head of one was about three feet from the foot of the other. One, Burial 307, was buried with no coffin, and it was the only coffin-less grave in the Early Group. It had been truncated by a later interment, and contained only a cranium and right shoulder and arm. The remains were identified as those of a probable male between forty-five and fifty-five years old. It is possible he was a stranger and newly-arrived in the town and no one provided him with a coffin when he died; or, alternatively, that his survivors or his household could not afford a coffin.

The presence of the coffin-less burial and of the south-headed burial(s) in the Early Group raise questions about whether social characteristics or types of death left distinctive material signatures. The fact that these graves were located somewhat apart from the concentration in the middle area might lend support to an interpretation that the deceased were different in some way.

### Burial 247: a secondary burial

Burial 247 is a possible early interment that lay immediately beneath Burial 213. The skeletal remains were identified as those of a probable man from thirty-five to fifty years old. The bones were completely disarticulated (with the possible exception of a few vertebrae), and had been placed in a small pile in the east end of the later grave of Burial 213. It appears that the Burial 213 gravedigger removed and stacked the bones with care, as was also observed in the case of Burial 120, as noted in our discussion of the middle concentration. Excavators suggested that some remnants of the Burial 247 coffin might have been moved to surround the bones, as if to maintain an enclosed effect.



Burial 247 simply may have been an early grave that was inadvertently disturbed. But the later Burial 213 was so precisely aligned as to appear deliberate. This may have been a case of deliberate, rather than chance, secondary burial. (See Chapter 7 for a similar case from the Middle Group, Burial 175).

Figure 6.9.

*In situ* photograph of Burial 247. The bones had been placed at the foot of the grave, presumably at the time Burial 213 was interred. The position of the foot-end of the Burial 213 coffin (which had been removed when the photograph was taken) can be seen at the bottom of the photograph (where the label "B247" was placed). North is to the left, and the ruler is in inches. Photograph by Dennis Seckler.

### Burial 404: empty coffin

Burial 404 was located in a very disturbed area at the rear of Lot 18, but excavators believed that the coffin was empty prior to the disturbance. Although the coffin had collapsed, it appeared to be complete. Drawings indicate it was probably four-sided, tapering toward the foot, although excavators notes state it was hexagonal. Disturbances were observed at the foot end, and also on the south side adjacent to the head of the coffin. Nails were recorded around the perimeter of the coffin, mainly at the bottom. Excavators emphasized that the coffin bottom was represented by the *in situ* nails as well as an "extremely thick" organic stain. It was their opinion that the body had been removed from the coffin at some time prior to its decomposition. Though we should keep in mind the possibility that the burial had been disturbed from above during a construction episode in the past, it is difficult to envision the complete removal of the remains while leaving the coffin relatively intact.

In this and other cases of empty coffins (from later temporal groups), there are two possibilities: the deceased were removed from their coffins after interment, or empty coffins were interred intentionally. The first possibility points to *at least* two scenarios: secondary burial and grave robbing. The second possibility (empty coffins interred intentionally) also points to at least two scenarios, one alluding to religious sensibilities and practices, and the other to deception and stealth. A ritual burial, with the coffin representing an individual whose body could not be recovered, is possible. A sham burial, to mark a death that did not occur, is also possible.